

14 October 1969

Mr. Bannerman via Mr. Coffey:

At the noon meeting Monday you mentioned again the confusion that exists about "archives" and "historical records". Simply stated, there is no distinction. Archives are historical records. As defined by the Civil Service Commission for the Archivist of the United States, archives are "(1) those bodies of non-current permanently valuable records that form useful evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations or other activities of Federal agencies or very important Federal officials, or (2) those records that must, or should, be preserved for their informational content.... Archival records document official actions and serve as sources for official reference in the prosecution of the affairs of government by providing a record of past actions. The information contained in Archives is essential to historians, political scientists, economists, sociologists, or other scholars engaged in study of various aspects of our society."


History, according to Webster's Collegiate dictionary, is "1. A narrative of events; a tale; story 2. A systematic written account of events, particularly of those affecting a nation, institution, science, or art, usually connected with a philosophical explanation of their causes".

Another way of saying it would be that history is a philosophical narrative account of events as collected, interpreted, and hung together by the historian who has done a lot of research through the historical documents stored in the archives.

I suspect our confusion grows out of repeated reference to records stored at the Records Center which have been scheduled for permanent retention. This means that the initial judgment of the people sending them there, (case officers, analysts, intelligence officers, records officers, etc.) has been that these are worth preserving for posterity, that they have historical significance and should be preserved in the archives. The initial, laymans judgment, however, is not adequate. These records must be evaluated and appraised by professional archivists to determine their continuing value. "Archivists employ a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the history, organization and operations of the Agency.... and the needs of the scholarly community." Accordingly, the records we have scheduled for permanent retention- the so-

called "historical documents"-will become archives - truly historical documents - after they have been screened, evaluated and appraised by qualified archivists.

I hope this helps.



RHW